

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NEA-07 NSCE-00 SSO-00 INR-05
CIAE-00 SP-02 IO-06 SSM-01 INRE-00 /044 W
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O P 211627Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4535
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENNA 10863

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY, AU
SUBJECT: VISIT OF AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO SYRIA

REF: (A) VIENNA 10274, (B) VIENNA 10413

1. DURING THREE-DAY (DECEMBER 17-19) VISIT TO SYRIA, FOREIGN MINISTER PAHR HELD TALKS WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD AND SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM; MET WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVE KHADOUMI AND VISITED AUSTRIAN UN PEACE-KEEPING TROOPS ON GOLAN HEIGHTS. SENIOR MFA OFFICIAL, WHO ACCOMPANIED PAHR, PROVIDED FOLLOWING SUMMARY OF HIGHLIGHTS OF VISIT.

2. MEETINGS WITH ASAD AND KHADDAM: SYRIAN LEADERS TOOK TOUCH, INFLEXIBLE LINE IN EVALUATING SADAT VISIT TO ISRAEL, IDENTICAL IN SUBSTANCE WITH PUBLIC POSITION ADOPTED BY SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. SADAT WAS DENOUNCED AS "TRAITOR" TO ARAB INTERESTS AND PROMOTER OF DIVISION IN ARAB CAMP. PROSPECT OF SADAT ACHIEVING RESOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT IS NIL SINCE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS NOT IN POSITION TO OFFER ARAB WORLD ACCEPTABLE PACKAGE OF PROPOSALS. TWO PROPOSALS WHICH ISRAELIS ARE UNABLE TO PUT FORWARD,

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ACCORDING TO ASAD AND KHADDAM, ARE TOTAL MILITARY WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN OF PALESTINIANS TO OCCUPIED AREAS (WHICH IN LATTER CASE UNDERSTOOD, ACCORDING TO MFA SOURCE, TO INCLUDE ISRAEL ITSELF). IF CURRENT SITUATION REQUIRES CONTINUATION OF PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE (READ TERRORISM), THIS PROSPECT MUST BE ACCEPTED BUT SYRIAN GOVERNMENT DOES NOT APPROVE OF AIRCRAFT HIJACKINGS. SYRIAN LEADERS WERE

PARTICULARLY INCENSED OVER SADAT'S GOODWILL GESTURES (KISSING, WREATH-LAYING, ETC.) TOWARD ISRAELIS, INDICATING THAT WRATH OF ARAB WORLD WILL DESCEND ON SADAT FOR SUCH ACTS.

3. EFFORTS BY AUSTRIAN SIDE TO SET FORTH GOA ANALYSIS OF SITUATION DIFFERING FROM ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WERE DISMISSED BY SYRIAN LEADERS AS "UNREALISTIC AND IRRELEVANT." SYRIAN LEADERS ALSO REJECTED PROPOSITION THAT SADAT VISIT HAD BROUGHT ABOUT REAL CHANGE IN ATTITUDES IN ISRAEL AND ELSEWHERE CONCERNING IMPROVED PROSPECTS FOR SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND COMPROMISE TO ACHIEVE PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST. ASAD'S ANALYSIS OF SITUATION SUGGESTED TO AUSTRIAN SIDE THAT HIS SOLE AND IMMEDIATE AIM SEEMS TO BE REESTABLISHMENT OF ARAB UNITY ALONG WITH POLITICAL ISOLATION OF SADAT.

4. MEETING WITH PLO: PAHR PARTY MET WITH PLO REPRESENTATIVE KHADOUMI LATE ONE EVENING AT LATTER'S REQUEST. KHADOUMI'S OUTWARD TRUCULENCE AND DISJOINTED PRESENTATION, ALTERNATING BETWEEN THREATS OF NEW VIOLENCE AND PLEAS FOR UNDERSTANDING OF PLIGHT OF PALESTINIANS, CONVEYED TO AUSTRIANS IMPRESSION THAT PLO LEADERSHIP IS AT THIS JUNCTURE CONFUSED AND UNABLE TO COME UP WITH A VIABLE APPROACH TO DEAL WITH EVOLVING CURRENT SITUATION. THRUST OF KHADOUMI PRESENTATION WAS THAT PLO REGARDS MOST RECENT PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY ISRAELIS AS TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE,
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THAT PLO MOST RECENTLY HAD FOLLOWED MORE PEACEFUL APPROACH WITHOUT HOWEVER ACHIEVING ANY RESULTS AND THAT, IF NECESSARY, PLO PREPARED TO MOUNT NEW ROUND OF MILITARY OPERATIONS AND ACTIONS AGAINST "ZIONISM."

5. VISIT WITH AUSTRIAN UN TROOPS: DISCUSSION BY MFA SOURCE WITH COL. PHILLIPS, HEAD OF AUSTRIAN MILITARY CONTINGENT ON GOLAN HEIGHTS, INDICATED THAT PHILLIPS HAS HELD SEPARATE, CONTINUING, LOW-LEVEL TALKS WITH ISRAELI AND SYRIAN MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES REGARDING EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS (WHO, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, WOULD BE POLITICAL PRISONERS). WHILE NO IMMEDIATE EXCHANGES ARE ANTICIPATED, NEITHER SIDE TO TALKS HAS INDICATED ANY WISH TO BREAK OFF USE OF PHILLIPS AS CONDUIT TO EXCHANGE VIEWS ON SUBJECT.

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6. COMMENTS BY SOURCE ON TRIP: PAHR'S DEPARTURES FROM CAREFULLY PREPARED BRIEFING PAPERS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND HIS DESIRE TO ACCOMMODATE AUSTRIAN PRESS ACCOMPANYING PARTY, RESULTED UNINTENTIONALLY IN CREATING FALSE MEDIA IMPRESSION THAT GOA "SHARES AND SUPPORTS" ASAD EVALUATION OF SADAT MISSION, POOR PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST, ETC. MFA SOURCE STATED THAT PAHR'S CHOICE OF WORDS TO DESCRIBE HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD MIDDLE EAST SITUATION AFTER MEETING WITH ASAD AS ONE OF BEING "DEPRESSED, BUT NOT WITHOUT HOPE" WAS "UNFORTUNATE" SINCE ASAD'S ANALYSIS WAS ALONG LINES OF WHAT AUSTRIANS HAD ANTICIPATED. MFA HAS ALREADY ISSUED "CORRECTION" ON DAMASCUS-ARABIC RADIO REPORT OF DECEMBER 19 (FBIS-JN 191225Y) QUOTING PAHR AS EXPRESSING "COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF SYRIAN ARAB VIEWS" AS MEANING THAT "PAHR NOW BETTER UNDERSTANDS SYRIAN POSITION WHILE AT SAME TIME EXPRESSING HIS REGRETS THAT OVERALL SOLUTION OF MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT SEEMS FARTHER AWAY THAN EVER." SOURCE INDICATED HE WAS NOT AWARE OF DAMASCUS RADIO REPORT IN ARABIC OF DECEMBER 19 (FBIS-JN 1917174) QUOTING PAHR IN DEPARTURE STATEMENT THAT "PRESIDENT AL-ASAD STRESSED CLEARLY AND FRANKLY SYRIA'S STAND REGARDING THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST FOLLOWING AS-SADAT'S VISIT TO ISRAEL. WHAT I HEARD GIVES ME THE

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IMPRESSION THAT THE SITUATION IS WORSE NOW THAN IT WAS BEFORE THE VISIT." DESPITE IMPLICATION OF PAHR "CORRECTION" ABOVE, SOURCE OPINED THAT THRUST OF QUOTE WAS NOT OFFICIAL GOA VIEW AND THAT MFA PRESS CORRECTION MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE.

7. MFA SOURCE REQUESTED THAT ABOVE INFORMATION BE

HANDLED, FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, AS SENSITIVE MATERIAL. BORG

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